



The Humane Society of the United States' Animal Research News & Analysis November 11, 2003

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1. NIH Official Foresees an Eventual End to Biomedical Research on Chimpanzees

A senior official at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has acknowledged that the days of using chimpanzees in harmful research may be numbered. During a question and answer session following the presentation he gave on the future of chimpanzee research at the American Association of Animal Laboratory Science (AALAS) conference in Seattle in October, he was asked by a representative of The Humane Society of the United States about the likelihood of a future ban on biomedical experimentation on chimpanzees. The NIH official replied, "It wouldn't surprise me, that at some time in the future—I don't want to get into when—that chimpanzees are not used," noting that world opinion is changing. Some European Union countries and New Zealand have already banned chimp research, while here in the U.S., public views are increasingly sympathetic towards chimpanzees. In light of these shifting attitudes, as well as congressional pressure for improved care of chimps once they are no longer useful in research, the NIH seems to be gradually becoming resigned to the possibility of a ban on chimpanzee research. "The public perception of this is evolving," said the official.

Contacted regarding these comments, Peter Singer, co-author of *The Great Ape Project* and a bioethicist at Princeton University, noted that "It's not going to be an all or nothing thing. It's a matter of making steady progress in changing people's views". Others take a more centrist view towards chimp research. "There is a middle path that would be best for all concerned. Change the rules to accommodate our latest appreciation of the ethical status of great apes—encouraging excellent medical care for them, from which we can learn a lot, as we do from human patients, and allowing research of the kind that would be generally acceptable in humans," said Ajit Varki, a University of California at San Diego medical professor who uses chimps in his studies.

Source: *Seattle Weekly*, October 22-28, 2003
(<http://www.seattleweekly.com/features/printme.php3?eid=48024>)

2. Whistleblower Draws Scrutiny to Columbia University

A veterinarian formerly employed at Columbia University's Institute of Comparative Medicine has gone public with allegations of severe animal suffering. The specific allegations include inadequate veterinary care resulting in animal pain, distress and/or death; unapproved deviations from research protocols; lack of overnight care and humane endpoints; and inadequate record-keeping, among others. After filing complaints within the institution, the whistleblower went to People for the Ethical Treatment (PETA) with her concerns. PETA has obtained disturbing video footage from within the institution, and has called upon appropriate federal agencies to investigate.

In response to an inquiry from The HSUS regarding the initial investigation at Columbia, the USDA indicated that "...several animals were found dead or in a morbid or moribund condition following surgery with little or no care having been provided". The USDA also found inadequate training of veterinary staff, poor communication between caretakers and staff, and inadequate observation of animals post-operatively. A Columbia spokesperson has said that the institution has responded with "swift corrective action," but PETA has raised concerns as to whether that action has been effective. *The HSUS believes that whistleblower-based exposés such as the one at Columbia reflect poorly not only on the institutions involved, but also on the adequacy of animal research oversight in the United States. These exposés also lead outsiders to wonder whether such problems are more widespread than currently acknowledged.*

Source: *New York Daily News*, October 21, 2003; *CNN*, October 12, 2003
(<http://www.cnn.com/2003/US/Northeast/10/12/columbia.animals.ap/index.html>); letter from the USDA to The HSUS, dated July 9, 2003

3. Three Refinement Alternatives Adopted by the European Pharmacopeia Commission

Three alternative methods for assessing the potency of vaccines have been adopted by the European Pharmacopeia Commission, which, like its counterparts in the US and elsewhere, sets standards for the production of vaccines, hormones, drugs and other therapeutic products. All three alternatives are based on analyses of blood-samples taken from experimental animals, but the new methods spare the animals from experiencing disease. Two of the methods assess the potency of human tetanus vaccines, and were validated in a joint study by the European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods (ECVAM) and the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines (EDQM). The third alternative assesses the potency of vaccines for swine erysipelas, a potentially fatal disease in pigs. This method was validated in a study coordinated by the Paul Ehrlich Institute (Langen, Germany).

In the United States, vaccine potency testing accounts for the majority of research animals that experience unrelieved pain and distress, at least among those animals regulated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture under the Animal Welfare Act. "The Humane Society of the United States is happy to see alternative methods for vaccine potency testing adopted by a standard-

setting authority,” said Dr. Martin Stephens, Vice President for Animal Research Issues at The HSUS. “The potential of these and similar methods to eliminate research animal suffering is considerable.”

Source: *ECVAM Newsletter*, July/August 2003 (<http://ecvam.jrc.it/index.htm>) and *High-Tech in Place of Animals*, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety; Berlin, Germany

4. NIEHS, EPA Offer Grants to Develop Non-Animal Testing Methods

Two U.S. government agencies have announced the availability of new funding for the development of non-animal methods for evaluating potential hazards posed by chemicals in the environment. Such evaluations are traditionally carried out on live animals. The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), one of the National Institutes of Health, is seeking to fund the development of methods that take advantage of new technologies in metabonomics, genomics, proteomics, imaging, stem cells and computer modeling, for chemical assessment. Specific targets include acute, organ, and eye toxicity, as well as hypersensitivity and phototoxicity. Up to \$100,000 per project will be available to small businesses during the initial phase of funding. The application deadline is November 14, 2003.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is interested in using similar non-animal methods to identify endocrine disruptors—chemicals that disturb the body’s hormonal system. Three to five awards of \$150,000-\$250,000 per year will be available for up to three years. These awards stem, at least in part, from a Congressional mandate for the EPA to invest in non-animal methods for its various testing programs. The deadline for submitting proposals is January 21, 2004.

Source: *NIEHS* (<http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/funding/SBIRContract2004/PHS2004-1.pdf>); *The Scientist*, September 3, 2003 (<http://biomedcentral.com/news.20030903/02>)

5. Research Animal Use Declines in New Zealand

New Zealand used 318,583 animals in research, testing and education in 2002, a 17% decrease from 2001. Mice, rats and fish were the most commonly used species. Seventy-eight percent of the animals experienced little or no suffering, 16% experienced moderate suffering, 1% experienced severe suffering, and 5% experienced very severe suffering (these figures are similar to what was reported in 2001). Mice accounted for 93% of the animals in the very severe suffering category. Commercial work and basic biological research accounted for 52% of animal use. Most animal use occurred in commercial organizations (35%), Crown Research Institutes (31%), Universities (30%) and government departments (4%).

Source: *The National Animal Ethics Advisory Committee, Annual Report 2002* (<http://www.maf.govt.nz/biosecurity/animal-welfare/naeac/annual-report/naeac-ar-02.pdf>)

Animal Research News & Analysis is an electronic newsletter that provides up-to-date news stories and interpretive analyses concerning the use of animals in research, testing, and education. The newsletter is produced by

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Animal Research Issues, The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)
(301) 258-3041, <http://www.hsus.org/ace/11348>

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